



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

WESTERN REGION

450 GOLDEN GATE AVENUE, BOX 36063
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94102

REPLY REFER TO:

H30
(WR)RC

November 23, 1976

Memorandum

To: Director, National Park Service
ACTION
From: Regional Director, Western Region
Subject: The Sir Francis Drake Landing Site Controversy and the
Quadracentennial in 1979

On November 2, 1976, a meeting was held in this Office at the request of the Drake Navigators Guild, attended by six Guild members. The Guild has been advancing, for many years, Drake's Cove in Point Reyes National Seashore as the landing and repair site of Drake, June 17 - July 23, 1579. This is six years prior to the earliest English colony in Virginia.

At the present time, two other landing sites are being promoted in the San Francisco area: San Quentin Cove in San Francisco Bay by Robert H. Power, the current President of the California Historical Society; and Bolinas Bay/Bolinas Lagoon by Dr. V. Aubrey Neasham, retired historian and President of Western Heritage, Inc.

Over the years, the Drake Navigators Guild has frequently contacted Point Reyes National Seashore advancing their case--while more recently, Mr. Power has been advancing San Quentin Cove as the landing site to Golden Gate National Recreation Area. The "California Historical Quarterly", Fall 1974, was devoted to the three sites and the Society has sponsored tours and exhibits. A "replica" of Drake's ship, the Golden Hinde, is docked in San Francisco and operated as a visitor attraction. Newspapers have carried numerous articles on the three sites and various historians and archeologists throughout the United States have indicated their choice.

The Drake Navigators Guild refers to an understanding that was reached in 1964 by Western Regional Director Hummel, his staff, and the proponents of the various landing sites to have an impartial panel of historians review this matter. At our recent meeting with them, they express considerable dissatisfaction with the panel review that was made by three non-Service



McDowell 11/23/76

professionals in 1971. They feel the assessment was inadequate in scope, thoroughness, and time.

The 1971 assessment noted that while Drake's Cove was possibly the site, primary historical/archeological data was lacking. The 1971 review also encouraged additional study by the Guild. A further problem to the acceptance of the assessment is the fact that one of the members of the panel now has associated himself with one of the other possible sites. This has served to cast doubt on the objectivity of the work of this panel.

The Guild's current position is that their mass of data on the site conclusively proves that it is the site. Recently, the Guild has contacted Congressman Phillip Burton, which in turn resulted in a letter to the Secretary and a response. This in turn has resulted in further correspondence with the Secretary and your Office in which the Guild expresses their dissatisfaction and requests that the Secretary's Advisory Board, or an impartial committee, consider the matter.

We feel that the Drake's Landing Site controversy must be settled. The 400th Anniversary will serve to focus considerable attention on the matter. Already, political interest is developing as noted above. From the historians point of view, it has obvious interest since it predates the earliest English colony in Virginia and represents a site of at least national significance. Because of this interest and the recognition provided by the National Register of Historic Places, it is again obvious why proving the site of the Drake's Landing is so important.

The entire matter has a close parallel to reaching a verdict regarding a major crime. There may be no witnesses to the crime, but a mass of circumstantial evidence may prove to an impartial jury that the defendant was in fact at the scene and did commit the act. In the case here, it appears highly unlikely that site verification will be made by physical remains--archeological or historical. Yet, the circumstantial evidence is massive.

We believe the importance of this site is sufficient to warrant a thorough and complete review to establish an answer to the question by a "court" of historians and archeologists whose final answer could withstand any challenge. The ultimate objective would be:

Determine if the evidence that exists is sufficient to prove the Drake's Landing Site. Such proving would have to be adequate to meet National Register Criteria and for designation as a National Historic Landmark.

We believe that the matter might first be reviewed by the Western Regional Advisory Committee at least for a review of procedure. A recommendation

McDowell 11/23/76

could be carried to paneling of a group to review and render a decision on the question. This in our mind is the critical factor: the selection of a panel of judges (historians, archeologists, and possibly others) who cannot be impeached.

Even though the 400th Anniversary is over two and a half years away, we believe immediate attention is warranted. If you concur, we are prepared to move ahead with the first step involving our Advisory Committee.

(SGD) LYLE H. McDOWELL

cc:

Associate Director, Preservation of Historic Properties, National Park Service
Attention: National Register Division

Associate Director, Management & Operations, National Park Service
Attention: Cultural Resources Management Division

Manager, Bay Areas National Parks

Superintendent, Point Reyes

Superintendent, Golden Gate